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ABSTRACT

An active and viable student council can help to involve both rebellious and uncommitted students in useful outlets. The major causes of ineffective councils are homogeneous membership, weak leadership, and misinformed faculty advisors. Principals should take the initiative in solving these problems. To break down homogeneity, the council should represent groups divided along curriculum lines and student members at large should be appointed to broaden membership. To avoid weak leadership, the council should select its own officers. Full faculty support of the council is necessary if the faculty advisor is to be successful. In addition, the advisor must balance his actions to achieve a feeling of independence by the council. Of necessity, the faculty advisor must be aware of parliamentary procedure and school law and policy, and be able to empathize with the young. To insure viability of the council more concern for activities relating to teaching, learning, and community service should be encouraged, rather than the customary fund-raising and dance-sponsoring activities. (LN)

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The Principal and the Student Council

ALLAN A. GLATTHORN



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*New Directions for
Student Councils*
NUMBER TEN

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The Principal and the Student Council

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The writer wishes to express his deepest appreciation to the faculty and students of Abington High School who have all helped him understand more fully the true meaning of student participation in school administration. He acknowledges also his special indebtedness to the one who awakened him.

Foreword

IN THIS booklet, a discerning high school principal writes cogently about rebellious and uncommitted students and what the student council can do to bring these students back into the fold of learning and participation.

The author envisions an active council, one that is an authentic force in the school, one that is permitted to deal with relevant and important problems. He makes clear that the principal must take the initiative in insuring that the council has adequate support and facilities, the proper adviser, and genuine—albeit limited—authority.

Although the author is at times sharply critical of schools and student councils, his is a positive and an optimistic statement. We hope that principals and advisers consider his points and act upon them. We believe that if they do, our councils, our schools, and ultimately all of our educational system will benefit.

We wish to express our special thanks to Mr. Glatthorn; to Gerald M. Van Pool, who, as NASSP Director of Student Activities, oversees the entire New Directions series; to Richard P. Harland, who edited the manuscript; and to Margaret Lilly, who typed the manuscript.

ELLSWORTH TOMPKINS

Secretary

National Association of Student Councils

Executive Secretary

National Association of Secondary School Principals

*The
Principal
and the
Student
Council*

This Generation- and Its Student Council

WE LIVE in difficult times, times that are totally unlike any other we have ever known. And this turmoil that besets our larger society is inevitably reflected in the school environment. Principals, teachers, and students consequently find themselves working together in a school environment completely different from any they have ever known, and they perforce are required to find new answers to questions that they thought had been answered once and for all.

Certainly one of the most important of these questions is, "What kind of student council will prove to be the most viable for the 1970's—and how can the school principal help bring it about?" It is to this two-fold question that this publication is addressed. If, as suggested, these are different times, with different schools, it would seem obvious for us to begin with an analysis of how *the students* are different before we try to determine how they can best participate in school administration.

It is the thesis of this chapter that the high school students today who should most concern us are the rebels and the uncommitted, and that the high school principal who would have an effective student council must of necessity understand both. Let us then examine each in turn.

THE REBEL

The decade of the sixties will probably be remembered—at least by educators—as the era of college student rebellion. Reaching a crest with the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley,

the student activist movement, once confined to a relatively few universities, spread across the nation until its tremors were felt in small rural colleges, in suburban community colleges, and even in urban technical institutes. When the protest movement began in the late fifties, it focussed on the Negro's drive for equal rights; in time, however, it broadened to include such issues as nuclear testing, the arms race, freedom on the campus, the quality of education, and most of all the war in Vietnam. And, of course, there were always the lesser issues that seemed, on some campuses at least, to draw even more fire from the students: cafeteria food and prices, college regulations about drinking and sexual conduct, and tuition increases. Regardless of the issues or the place, the signs were unmistakable: the college student of the sixties was in revolt against established authority.

It seems vitally important for high school principals to understand something of the nature and genesis of this revolt because there are signs that just as the high school student imitates his college brother in the clothes he wears and the books he reads, so will he in all likelihood imitate him in his newly-found activism. Indeed, it is clear that the student protest movement has already made an impact on many high schools. An "underground" student press can be found in many of the large suburban high schools; militant Negro students have demanded meetings with a school superintendent in one of our big cities to confront him with their petitions for courses in "black history and culture"; and in another city, students have petitioned for the removal of a principal. The safest prediction we can make at this time, then, is that during the next few years high school students will very likely become much more active in their rebellion against school authority, and it behooves us as educators to try to understand why these rebellious students think the way they do.

Parental Influence

Surprisingly, there is some indication that they learned rebelliousness from their parents. Richard Flacks, reporting in

Psychology Today (October, 1967) on research recently completed, suggests that student activism is a result of, not a rebellion against, parental influence. Essentially, Flack's studies indicate that by and large the student rebels were reared by parents who were liberal, permissive, and democratic. Flack puts it this way: "Student activists and their parents are . . . strongly characterized by humanistic values Two clusters of values can be identified within the humanistic subcultures. The first is a basic concern with individual development and self-expression, with a spontaneous response to the world The second group of values within the humanistic subcultures might be called ethical humanist. There is a sincere concern for the social condition of others." Essentially, then, activist students and their parents share the same sense of values, and we in the schools are trying to educate a generation reared by permissive liberals, who early planted the seeds of revolt in their young.

Assertion of Individuality

Unconscious parental sanction aside, what else is it that drives the young to rebel against the school? One strong possibility is that the school is just a convenient target for a protest against the emasculation of the individual by a mass society, an emasculation that even we adults feel rather keenly. We live in a time when we seem overwhelmed by bigness—big cities, big corporations, big government, and big schools. Submerged in the mass, we feel that we no longer have any power to manage our own destinies. This sense of powerlessness often makes us believe that we have somehow become the unwitting victims of an uncontrollable fate. If we adults feel this way, then it is obvious that the dependent juvenile will feel it all the more sharply. Sensing a loss of individuality and feeling the panic of powerlessness, the teen-ager often in desperation lashes out against his school and the people who administer it. "Here I can make an impact; here is a place where you will listen to me," he often seems to be saying.

One Negro boy who had been instrumental in fomenting some racial trouble put it this way to me: "I walk down the hall, and nobody pays any attention to me; nobody cares. I want them to look at me. I want them to know I'm around. So I give a push, and I give a shove, and I yell some slogans, and then they see me. Then they know I'm around. That's a good feeling, to know that people see you." Thus, much of the rebellion is simply a desire to be seen, to make a presence felt, to make a voice heard in a society which unfortunately finds ways of ignoring most of us.

Youthful Idealism

A third factor that prompts rebellion in youth is that the young are—happily for the rest of us—still idealistic, still hopeful that answers can be found to the problems of injustice, discrimination, poverty, and war. As we age, we learn to make compromises and call it wisdom; while young, we insist on solutions and call it courage. Thus the teen-ager is highly sensitive to real and imagined slights, and he is just as upset when those he likes are slighted as when he himself is the victim. An unfair teacher, an overly-rigid administrator, a rule that doesn't make sense, an unfounded charge—all these are sufficient cause in his mind for protesting, for petitioning, for demonstrating. We may scoff at his lack of perspective that equates as issues the food in the cafeteria and the war in Vietnam, but we forget that we adults have also been most sensitive to the issues that are closest to us.

Spirit of Lawlessness

A final cause is simply the rather obvious contagion of rebellion to which all of us today are susceptible. These are days when the cornerstone of the law is rapidly being eroded by the lawless action of individuals and groups. Large corporations are indicted for price-fixing. White collar crime increases beyond all expectation. Negroes riot in protest against what they

see as injustice. Peace protesters defy the law and upset the selective service machinery. With defiance of the law so much a covert and an overt part of life today, it is not at all surprising that we find ourselves dealing with a generation of rebels.

To what extent does this rebel, driven by such factors, pose a real threat to the schools? It would be foolhardy to underestimate the damage that he can do. Sit-ins that disrupt the orderly operation of the school, mass walkouts that blacken irreparably the school's reputation, uncontrolled violence that ruins property and endangers lives—these are grave problems that cannot be dismissed lightly as “teen-age highjinks.” Yet this writer would argue that there is hope for the rebel and his school, if the school can channel his rebellion; and we can find much to praise in any rebel, regardless of his color or his cause. He cares deeply. He is brave enough to take a chance. He commits himself to action. And he still believes that he can make an impact on the world around him. Rebellion is always a sign of life—and life is always to be prized even when it is most threatening.

We feel less sanguine about the uncommitted. They concern us much more, for they are harder to reach—and perhaps in the long run pose an even greater threat to the schools. Let us then turn our attention to them.

THE UNCOMMITTED

The masses of students who inhabit our suburban schools are best described by adjectives suggesting passivity: uncommitted, uninterested, indifferent, detached, unmoved. And such adjectives as these suggest an overriding characteristic: a deadly sense of withdrawal from life.

These students have indeed withdrawn from every phase of life. They either don't attend church or attend under duress only and sit passively. They smile condescendingly at community activities, for “community” to them is a housing development which for the moment happens to include the house in which their parents are living. Preferring always to stay at

home and watch television, they assiduously avoid involvement and activity with the family.

Even in human relationships they are passive and uncommitted. Deep love between them is increasingly rare. Lasting friendships are those that endure beyond the summer, and a man is valued in terms of the number of casual acquaintances he has. "He knows lots of people" has replaced "he has many friends" as the supreme accolade. Even when they dance, they avoid physical contact.

It is at school that their withdrawal is most noticeable. In the classroom they sit passively and wait for the teacher to titillate, and perchance to inform. In the assembly they slump with blasé indifference to all attempts at exhortation and amusement. They don't buy the school paper, yell the school cheers, or sing the school's praises. And the activity program leaves them totally unmoved. They either never join a club or join only to withdraw after a few meetings. And the student council is a joke, a bore, an administrative "put-on."

Sometimes they fool even the professionals amongst us. Many communities, hearing the strident voices of a few teen-age leaders crying out for a recreation center, have opened elaborately decorated centers only to find them shunned by those they were trying to reach.

The picture is familiar: The uncommitted student is the average student, totally uninterested in all that life has to offer him—or so it seems. What has produced such withdrawal? How did he get that way?

Fast-paced Rate of Social Change

Kenneth Keniston sees the chronic and constantly accelerating change of our society as one of the major factors in this alienation. Keniston argues that we live in a world that changes so rapidly and so constantly that the young lack any sense of identification with a meaningful past. "These students are extreme in their lack of any conscious sense of relatedness to their

personal pasts, in their inability to make commitments for the future, in their cult of the present. In their lives we have seen writ small all of the large problems we have considered here: inability to find connections with the past and future, abrupt discontinuity between themselves and those of the previous generation . . .; a failure of identification with their parents; a fruitless search for enduring and solid values. Each of these problems contributes to their unwillingness to accept the adult life offered by their society; for a readiness to be a member of a community presupposes either a sense of past relationship with it or a future hand in shaping it, and these young men have little of either."¹ And this unwillingness to accept the adult life is one more type of withdrawal.

The Effects of Bigness

A second societal reason is found in our being forced to live in a society that has grown too big for us to manage. Big business, big cities, big government, big schools—all leave us with a sense of impotence. Whereas the rebel reacted by throwing grit into the big machine, the withdrawn, uncommitted student cynically knows that even the grit would be ground to lubricant by a machine too big to stop.

Decline of Law

Third, they have lived in a society where crime has been rampant and where immorality has flourished. Consequently, they have developed a cynicism more befitting the aged than the young. Every man has his price, they say, and every cause its base motive. Such a premature cynicism has produced in them a violent distrust of ideology. They are not an easy mark for communism, for every "ism" except egocentrism is to them suspect. In these circumstances, there is a certain logic in withdrawal; after all, if you live in a world that you distrust, the

¹ Kenneth Keniston. *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965. p. 239.

most sensible thing to do—it often appears—is to avoid all contact with it.

A Pervasive Fear

Most of all, however, this is a society that the uncommitted fear. A sense of dread fills the air: we fear the Russians, the Chinese, the Cubans; we fear pollution, and smog, and overpopulation. We fear the Negro who riots in our cities and the mobster who corrupts our officials. Faced with such nagging fears the young find refuge in indifference. If the youth pretends not to care, then he cannot be hurt by caring too much. If he wears the mask of indifference, no one will know that he weeps anxious tears of dread. And if he can escape permanently into the self, nothing then can hurt him.

It is thus easy to see how the society we live in has produced an indifferent generation of uncommitted. Yet one more major factor needs to be underscored: This is the television generation, who log endless hours of passive entertainment. Sitting glassy-eyed in front of the magic screen, they have seen bloodshed and rape, bombings and slaughter, riot and starvation, sin and corruption—all from a safe distance, all clouded in the unreal miasma of television. And this is the way they would travel through life if they had their way—as passive onlookers of a vast entertaining spectacle, forever amused and perpetually safe.

While we can understand the uncommitted, we find it hard to condone his inaction or to approve his indifference, for he poses a grave threat to a democratic society, which requires commitment and involvement if it is to survive. Through his indifference and his inactivity, the uncommitted will destroy those institutions that the rebel can only rail against ineffectively. He will stand and watch while our freedoms are eroded; he will not lift a hand while our values are attacked.

A FINAL WORD

The rebel and the uncommitted, each in his own way, threatens our school and our society. If the school does not

reach the rebel, he will use extra-legal means to air his grievances. He will petition, demonstrate, sit-in—do all he can to disrupt the operation of the school, for he is determined to make his grievances known and to get the attention he needs. If the school does not reach the uncommitted, he will spend his growing years vegetating. He will sit passively in class, will drop out of activities, will withdraw from involvement, and by sheer force of numbers turn the school into a place of decay and death. It is my contention that the school has no greater responsibility to the society of which it is a part than to reach these two groups who so far stand outside—one to attack, the other to watch indifferently.

The school, then, must mobilize all its forces to reach these two disparate groups; and of all the forces it can bring to bear, the student council shows greatest potential for success. Neither the football team nor the mathematics curriculum will reach them all. The football team—and all athletics—are rejected by the rebel as being irrelevant, and the mathematics curriculum—and all the academic content—are seen by the self-serving conformist as being impractical.

But an active student council, broadly representative in its membership, led by dynamic students, advised by a sensitive teacher, caught up in exciting projects, can be the force that will save them both.

*The
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Why Some Student Councils Are Failing

FOR THE MOST PART, the school's curriculum has failed to reach both the alienated and the indifferent students who comprise such a large part of America's high schools. Since the modern curricula that most schools boast of are to a great extent insipid and dull, it is only the highly motivated student who can get excited by the curricular part of the school's offerings. Almost by default, then, it becomes necessary for the out-of-class activities program to reach out and grab these students who lie so far beyond the pale. And it would seem that the student council, of all activities, is uniquely structured to meet this challenge. Yet many councils are having serious difficulty in reaching students who, taken together, could become an effective force. What are the reasons for this failure?

The answer, it would seem, lies in the areas of membership, leadership, advisership, and program. Each of these is related to and impinges upon all the others, although each can profitably be examined separately.

MEMBERSHIP

A major weakness of some student councils is that their memberships are too homogeneous, failing to include a true cross section of the student body. Too often the students elected to the council are cast in the same mold: fair-haired, middle-class, white, conformists.

It is understandable why we have such homogenized membership, composed of a single type of member. First, it is this kind of student who desires council membership. He is con-

cerned about getting into college and sees council membership as one way of impressing the admissions officer. All through life he has been conditioned to regard the acclaim of others as the measure of his success; election to council is an important indicator of such success. Second, he is genuinely liked by his fellow-students, for he is innocuous and has cultivated well the arts of popularity. He looks the part of leader: hair well-trimmed, clothes stylish but not too extreme, on the slim side, features cleancut and regular. And, finally, he is the kind who is most readily approved by the administration and the faculty: he won't cause trouble, he will project a good image for the school, and he makes for the school administration one more good friend among the community elite.

Such a homogenized membership is at the root of much of the trouble in which councils today find themselves. First, to the school at large such a homogenized membership gives a council the reputation of being a collection of panty-waists who have been elected solely because they won't cause trouble. The comment by Peter, in Edgar Friedenberg's *The Vanishing Adolescent* that "Our student government is controlled by the same group for four years"² is typical of the attitude held by many high school students.

Second, such homogeneity effectively freezes out a large segment of the student body who should be represented. The lower-class student who sees a council composed of middle-class conformists gets the message: he isn't wanted, and he doesn't have a chance. Thus the council misses the contribution of an important part of our society. The student from the lower socioeconomic classes has much to contribute to any school and its student council: he has the wisdom that stems from the necessity of making his way, the insight derived from the need to survive, the discontent produced by intolerable conditions. And his wisdom, his insight, his discontent are all much needed in schools and councils today.

² Edgar Z. Friedenberg. *The Vanishing Adolescent*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959. p. 154.

But, perhaps most alarming of all, such homogeneity results in council decisions that do not reflect the entire spectrum of student opinion. Typically, there is little meaningful conflict in a student council, because the members represent the same background, desire the esteem of their friends, and look down on those who cause conflict. In the absence of such meaningful struggle, the decisions—such as they are—that the council makes are likely to be unanimous and reflect the biases of the middle class members. Read the dress codes of any ten student councils chosen at random and notice how appallingly alike they are. (In point of fact, they were probably borrowed from each other.)

This is not, of course, to suggest that all councils show the same pattern of a homogenized membership. Some councils, through accident or design, manage to get a well-balanced representation of all minority groups and socio-economic classes. Nor can we conclude that heterogeneity is an unquestioned virtue and homogeneity an unalloyed vice. After all, the United States Congress has gotten along reasonably well by selecting its members from the ranks of upper class attorneys. The point, however, is that most schools would benefit from a council membership that more accurately reflects the real make-up of its student body.

THE LEADERSHIP

A second reason for the council's failing to reach the large mass of the students is in the type and quality of leadership. Who is the student council leader and why do his attributes present a problem?

It is difficult, of course, to generalize about student council leadership since there are no definite studies available to give us an accurate picture. However, extensive observation of schools and much discussion with school leaders do suggest that we can make certain generalizations about many council officers. First, they are students with an almost aggressive need to be popular. They are students who are willing to endure the

rigors of an arduous campaign in order to glory in the esteem that election brings. Second, they are students who have succeeded in some other realms of school activities, chiefly athletics, and are convinced that such success inevitably leads to success as a leader of the student council. The successful newspaper editor simply assumes that the same skills that brought him to the top of the newspaper staff will also enable him to be successful in the council. Third, they are students who are well-adjusted, who have learned how to get along and how to put up with much that is unpleasant. The student council officer typically has a clear career objective, has a college already selected, and is quite certain of the kind of girl he wants to marry. Finally, he is a student who knows how to get along with the school administration; he is anxious to curry favor, to know the wishes of administration, to be sure that he has received the message correctly.

Popular, well-adjusted, experienced in other fields, and supportive of administration—who could ask for better qualifications? Yet in a certain sense, each of these characteristics presents certain dangers of which the administration must be aware.

The student with the aggressive need to be popular can be a failure as a leader because he is tempted to sacrifice everything to the insatiable demands of popularity. He will rarely support an issue which he detects is unpopular with the student body. He will be reluctant to take a stand on any question where he senses that the student body is divided. He will be hypersensitive to the approval of other status leaders of the school and will anxiously seek their favor. He will diligently attempt to please everyone. And he will be astute enough to realize that the way to please everyone is to take no action at all, for every positive action is bound to displease some segment of the school's population.

The student who is well-adjusted can be a failure as a leader because he prizes harmony and adjustment above progress. He is the great reconciler who sees no virtue in conflict and who assiduously avoids hurting the feelings of others. The very

virtue for which he is acclaimed—the virtue of being well adjusted—is his because he has developed a frame of mind that can accept the unpleasant, accommodate to the unfair, and live with the intolerable. And it is this same sense of being well-adjusted that militates against any desire to right a wrong, to protest an injustice, or to oppose an evil. This is not to suggest that the student leader must be neurotic; we know the obvious dangers of being led by the fanatic who destroys that which he is trying to reform. It is to suggest, however, that the student who is too well-adjusted values harmony above progress and compromise above truth.

Can there be a problem with the student too experienced in other fields? Two immediately suggest themselves. The first is that the old friends can be a weight around his neck. The football captain turned council president has strong allegiances that may interfere with the objectivity he needs. The newspaper editor now chairing an important council committee may be tempted to leak important news prior to the time it should be released. Second, students experienced in other activities tend to think that they have nothing to learn, that they can apply the same techniques learned in publications and athletics to the complex task of leading the student council. While they realize soon enough that the skills that brought a football team to heel are not having the same results with the council, they are prone to think that the fault lies with council, not with their own lack of administrative know-how.

Finally, why is there a problem with a student council leadership too supportive of school administration? The first reason is that too-close cooperation effectively damns the student leader in the eyes of the rest of the school: they rather quickly brand him as “fink,” “applepolisher,” or whatever happens to be the current slang term for someone too friendly with the adversary. The second danger is that a good school administrator requires—and should welcome—constructive student opposition. Every school, like any large enterprise, begins to develop problem areas, and an outspoken student council leadership can be one way—a very effective way—of giving the principal

some important feedback. Without an independent student council leadership, constructively critical whenever necessary, the administration runs the risk of becoming complacent.

THE ADVISER

While many advisers are doing an outstanding job of providing dynamic leadership and direction for the groups under their charge, it is quite apparent that many councils are running into difficulty because the adviser is simply the wrong person for the job. The adviser plays a critical role in the success or failure of the council, and when the council fails, it is logical to look to the adviser for some of the causes. Let us try to sketch some of the types of advisers who are running into difficulty.

One adviser with problems is the young teacher who simply does not know how to work with students in an out-of-class activity. In order to be popular with the students and because he thinks that democratic leadership implies a policy of laissez-faire, he is reluctant to assert himself and allows council affairs to drift. Council members quickly become demoralized because they have no sense of direction, and the young adviser despairs because he knows he has been democratic and simply can't believe that the members are letting him down.

A second kind of adviser to be wary of is the old war-horse who really isn't committed to the idea of students participating meaningfully in school administration. He does not believe that young people can make their own decisions and, therefore, he bespeaks a basic distrust of the young. He may have been appointed to his advisership merely because he hung on tenaciously at the school, or became friendly with the principal, or is near retirement age, or wants to be relieved from a class or two. Often this type is completely out of touch with the teenage generation. He has almost no knowledge of the passions that move the young; he scoffs at ideas that are important to the teen-ager; and he lives and moves in a world in which there simply is no room for the young.

Once, in a moment of candor, a student council adviser of this persuasion in a school not far from mine admitted, "Look, let's be honest. My job is to help the students play the game of student council—going through the motions of setting up committees, making harmless decisions, raising money, and being sure not to get into the principal's hair." By his standards, this old war-horse was doing a fine job, and on his eventual retirement the principal had only words of praise for his "dynamic leadership" and his "understanding of kids."

There is a third kind of adviser that principals should avoid; i.e., the one who tries to direct too much. We all have seen many council projects which came about only through the untiring efforts of the adviser; he thought he was being a good adviser because he did all the work the students should have done. This is the adviser who can't keep his mouth closed at a meeting, who tells the president what to do, and who repeatedly lectures the group because they haven't been as active as other councils he used to have. Typically he is held in great esteem by the principal, who sees only the superficial results of a council engaged in many projects, but who fails to see the serious erosion of student leadership going on underneath the surface.

With all three types of advisership, councils soon run into difficulty. With the young, naive teacher who equates permissiveness with leadership, the council flounders from a lack of direction and wastes its time in "fun and games." With the old war-horse who thinks the whole thing is a game, the council soon turns into just that—a game of pseudo-democracy in which nothing meaningful is ever accomplished, except endless meetings with students going through the motions of leadership. With the faculty dictator, great projects are undertaken—and carried out to success by the tired adviser while the students learn the lesson that adults will always run their show.

THE PROGRAM

A homogeneous membership, weak leadership, and the wrong adviser—all these culminate in a meaningless program,

which turns out, then, to be both a cause and a symptom of a dysfunctional student council.

Most councils seem to be totally engrossed in fund-raising activities, to the extent that one is convinced that if council fund-raising were to be banned, then a goodly portion of student councils would quietly fade into oblivion. Read any council's report of its activities and you will find that fund-raising dominates most of its meetings and mobilizes all of its energies. Dances are held, cookies are sold, stores are operated, and plays are produced only that the council might enrich its treasury. This is not to suggest that councils are greedy; instead, they are almost profligate with the funds they have collected and speak with justifiable pride of gifts given to schools and moneys contributed to worthwhile charities. In fact, their largesse commits them to an endless round of raising funds, deciding who shall be the recipients, and raising more funds again.

When they are not busy raising funds, the weak councils are bogged down in trivia. When will the next dance be held? What will be the date of the next elections? What can be done to keep the cafeteria cleaner? Who will lead the next pep rally? These and other questions of similar moment occupy their time.

A few summers ago, at a national student council convention, we chided some of the leaders for not involving themselves in more meaningful projects. One president bristled, "We have worked on big projects. Last year our council developed a bulletin board policy."

The tragedy is not that councils are bogged down in trivia, but that they are convinced that that is all they are allowed to do. Somehow under the leadership of the principal, the student councils of our nation have to find a more meaningful sense of purpose, a clearer sense of direction.

*The
Principal
and the
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The Principal and Council Membership

WE HAVE suggested previously that one of the major weaknesses handicapping many student councils is the lack of a vital, diversified membership. This problem is so basic that it must be solved before any other steps can effectively be undertaken. The present chapter, then, will examine some methods of strengthening council membership.

MAKING COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP MORE ATTRACTIVE

Some councils are reporting difficulty in finding enough students interested in running for the student council. Various reasons are advanced: the allures of such modern attractions as the car and television; the widespread reluctance of youth to take an active part in school activities; and the general disenchantment of young people with government. Whatever the reasons, the problem is there and must be solved by a principal concerned with his council.

To a certain extent, however, the problem of council membership does not exist in isolation from the other aspects of council life. An exciting group of officers will stimulate many to wish to be members. An adviser who likes and is respected by young people will generate much enthusiasm. And a dynamic program will always attract recruits to its support. Consequently, membership, leadership, advisership, and program are all closely interrelated to the extent that an improvement in one will probably lead to at least a subtle improvement in all. There is, however, some obvious merit in beginning a program for council improvement by examining initially the question of membership.

The first step would be to analyze general student attitudes towards the council. While there will be some overt indicators that can easily be examined, such as letters and comments in the student newspaper and the number of candidates seeking council membership and office, it would be much wiser for the principal to undertake some more systematic analysis of the problem.

The two questionnaires below might help in this process of analysis. The administrator might choose to use both of them, although either can be administered independently. There is no need to administer them to an entire school; they could be given to a random sample of the student population or to a stratified sample (such as class members in a subject where ability grouping is used). Since the questionnaires can be completed anonymously, the administration would feel secure in asking for such identifying information as race and such clues to academic success as number of subjects failed.¹

The first instrument is a simple sentence completion questionnaire designed to elicit free responses about the student council:

SENTENCE COMPLETION FORM: STUDENT COUNCIL

We are interested in finding out how our students feel about student council. Will you help us first by giving us some information about you that will help us study your answers? *Please do not sign your name.*

Age _____ Sex: _____ Boy _____ Girl

Race: _____ White _____ Negro _____ Other

Grade _____ Are you a council member: _____ Yes _____ No

How many subjects did you fail last report period? _____

On the lines below are two sentences that are started but not finished. Complete each sentence to tell how you really feel. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. The student council _____

2. The members of our school's student council _____

¹ More information for the administrator about the use of such instruments in the school can be found in *Diagnosing Classroom*

The second instrument is a more detailed and more formally structured questionnaire whose answers can be tallied readily.

STUDENT COUNCIL QUESTIONNAIRE

We are interested in finding out how our students feel about our student council. Will you help us by giving us some information about you that will help us study your answers? *There is no need to sign your name.*

Age _____ Sex: _____ Boy _____ Girl
 Race: _____ White _____ Negro _____ Other
 Grade: _____ Are you a Council member _____ Yes _____ No
 How many subjects did you fail last report period? _____

Below are several questions which ask your opinion about the student council. Place a check next to that answer which most nearly reflects your own opinion. Please be completely honest. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. How successful is our student council in getting things done:
 - a. _____ Student council gets a great many things done.
 - b. _____ Student council gets some things done.
 - c. _____ Student council gets very little done.
2. How successful is our student council in keeping in close touch with our student body?
 - a. _____ Student council does a good job in keeping in touch with the student body.
 - b. _____ Student council does a fair job in keeping in close touch with the student body.
 - c. _____ Student council does a poor job in keeping in touch with the student body.
3. How do the school administration and the student council work together?
 - a. _____ The student council is dictated to by the administration.
 - b. _____ The student council cooperates with administration without being dictated to by them.
 - c. _____ The student council works completely independently of the school administration.

Learning Environments, Robert Fox, Margaret B. Luszki, and Richard Schmuck, Chicago, Science Research Associates, 1966.

4. How do you feel about most of the members of the student council?

a. _____ I like and respect most of the members of the council.

b. _____ I don't really know most members of the student council.

c. _____ I dislike most of the members of the student council.

A careful analysis of the results of either or both of these opinionnaires should give the principal some important ideas about how to attack the problem of lack of general student support. If, as is often the case, the results show that the council suffers from an image of a do-nothing organization lacking prestige and council membership is seen as an unwanted burden imposed only upon the too-willing, then the principal must take definite steps to change that image.

The most important factor is the principal's own attitude towards the council and how he conveys this attitude to the student body. At every opportunity, he should make it clear that the council has his support as the most important student group in the school. Together with council officers, he should work out a schedule of the meetings that he will attend, avoiding two dangers: first, of seeming to ignore the council by never attending; second, of seeming to dominate by attending too frequently. He should see to it that provisions are made and funds provided for council members and their adviser to attend conferences and workshops. He should publicly demonstrate his own support of council projects and make every attempt to be present at council functions. He should support the council against any unjustified faculty criticism. To a great extent, the principal will set the tone for the school by his attitude towards the council, and he must, therefore, use every opportunity he has to demonstrate that the council has his unqualified support.

A second basic way of making the student council more prestigious is by giving it the time and space to do its work. The principal should first be certain that the council is allowed time to meet during the school day. The pull of other interests and activities after school is so strong that no council

can function effectively if it has to meet outside of school hours. The principal either can schedule the council meeting as a regular part of members' schedules or can provide in-school meeting time by excusing students from certain classes, being sure to stagger the periods and days when council meets. There will, of course, be complaints from the faculty about members missing class time, but council members should be the type of students who can and will make up missed work. Also, there is really no more important learning experience than learning democracy by participating in its workings.

In addition, every council should have its own offices and workrooms. Ideally, of course, when schools are planned, the architect should include a large activity center for students, with part set aside for council offices. But even when such space is not available, the administration can at least turn over to the council some unused storage space to be reclaimed. And council members should be encouraged to decorate such space themselves, with no holds barred. If they wish to decorate it in the style of a "teen-age coffee-house," let them; the important thing is for them to feel that it really belongs to them.

If the principal gives every indication of supporting the council and if the council is given adequate time and space to do its work, students should certainly begin to change their attitude towards the council. Yet perhaps there is more that can be done to enhance the image of the council. While we are aware that the achievements of the council count for more than any public relations image-building, we should not overlook certain techniques that can be utilized to lift the prestige of the council and of council membership.

First, the principal might consider extending special privileges to council members. These special privileges should be seen *not* as an accolade bestowed upon some elite, but as a reward given to those who serve. Some student councils report that the following special privileges add to council's attraction without seeming to show undue favoritism:

- a student council honors pass to permit council members to travel freely throughout the building when not in class

- reduced prices for school athletic tickets, newspaper subscriptions, and other school publications
- a special section at athletic events reserved for council members
- discount cards from local merchants to student council members
- a minimal discount offered at the school store to council representatives
- special passes to community facilities, such as libraries and museums
- an unrestricted school bus ticket to members, permitting them to ride any school bus on which there is space
- tickets to school dances offered at reduced prices to members.

These privileges may seem petty, or they may seem to offend our egalitarian spirits. They will not, however, seem petty to the students, who will value them not for their intrinsic worth but for the sense of "specialness" that they confer. And we must be candid enough to admit that we do not live in an egalitarian society; just as the principal has privileges denied to the faculty, so the council members can legitimately have privileges not offered to most of the students. Since we all enjoy the symbols of status, it seems defensible to extend those symbols to those students bearing the responsibility of leadership.

Second, to enhance the council's image and to make it seem more like a group worth competing for, we should bend all our efforts to give the council the appearance of an important organization. Ideas like the following have been tried successfully in some schools:

- each member is given a special council memo pad with his name printed on it
- council members are awarded special pins or emblems to be worn on jackets or coats
- the council installation is accompanied by a banquet in the evening to which parents and distinguished guests are invited
- council officers and representative members are presented to the school board at a special board meeting
- a special video-tape is made of major council meetings and is made available for viewing by the student body
- a special council meeting is held during a class assembly, with the entire class observing and participating

- a "Student Council Recognition Day" is celebrated in school and community. Local merchants are encouraged to display the photograph of a student council member and there are special ceremonies of recognition held at the school or in a community center
- the student council is invited to attend a special meeting of the town council or the township officials. In preparation for this meeting, the student council studies intensively a local community problem affecting young people and attempts to draft a proposal concerning this problem which the township governing group might act upon.
- An evening council meeting is held, to which council members' parents and the public at large are invited.

Here again it might be considered an objection that we are proposing Madison Avenue techniques which are unduly concerned with image. Yet we would argue that the council can make an impact upon the student body most effectively if it does project an image of an organization that has achieved status in the school and community.

Third, council membership is more attractive when the council receives favorable treatment from the press. This is not to suggest that news about the council should be managed or controlled, for any censorship of valid criticism is abhorrent. It does suggest, however, that the principal can exert his leadership in helping the council get proper publicity. The following suggestions might have some value for councils looking for ideas:

- Install a council bulletin board which will feature council news and events and personalities.
- Select a "Student Council Member of the Week" (one of the members who has been most active and has rendered the most service) to be featured in notices in the school paper and on the bulletin board.
- Reserve time once a week for a special fifteen-minute council broadcast over the public address system. At such a time, the president can report, officers can present highlights of special council action, and members can keep the students informed about current projects.
- Put up posters on school bulletin boards announcing major council actions and decisions.

- Send a council column in to the local paper on a weekly or biweekly basis.
- Record a brief transcript of important council news and put it on a cartridge tape player in the library or the language laboratory, so that students can get an up-to-date summary of council news.
- Either at the end of the semester or the end of the year, issue a special council newspaper, or a special supplement to the school paper, calling attention to important council achievements.
- Solicit testimonials from teachers praising council for its effectiveness.
- Begin every school assembly with a special council report.

BROADENING THE BASE OF COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

While the three methods listed above will probably help in stimulating more students to run for the student council, there is still no guarantee that they will produce any dramatic change in the council's make-up. Most schools organize homeroom or advisory rooms on an alphabetical basis, drawing council members from homerooms or adviser rooms. While this seems to be the most democratic method, it seems to perpetuate a rather homogenized student council: in every homeroom the aggressive, middle-class popularity-seeker is elected and all the rest are rather systematically excluded.

Such, of course, is not always the case and principals interested in checking out the characteristics of council members and the extent of member homogeneity might want to have council members complete a questionnaire something like the following:

STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP DATA

To council members: We are interested in finding out what our council members are like as a group. Will you help us by completing the following questionnaire about you and your family? There is no need to sign your name; there are no right and wrong answers.

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your race? _____White _____Negro _____Other

3. What is your grade in school? _____
 4. How many school activities other than the council do you belong to? _____
 5. What is your rank in class? _____
 6. How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____
 7. What do you hope to do after you finish high school _____

 8. What church do you attend? _____
 9. What does your father do for a living? _____
 10. Does your mother work? _____
If yes, what kind of job does she have _____
 11. Do you work part-time after school? _____
 12. What grade in school did your father finish? _____
 13. What grade in school did your mother finish? _____
 14. Are your parents living together? _____
-

If the results of the questionnaire indicate that the council has drawn its membership almost entirely from a single socioeconomic class, or that it does not adequately represent all ethnic groups within the school, then the principal and the faculty should give serious consideration to ways of broadening the membership base.

If a school is organized into course or curriculum groups (college preparatory, business, vocational, general), members might be chosen from those course groups on a proportional basis. While such a method may be repugnant to some, it is not inherently wrong and it will guarantee equal representation of all groups. If total election along these lines seems impossible, then the principal might consider having a certain number of members-at-large chosen from each of these course groups.

Here is another way to ensure broad representation: have council members elected from any class grouping where stratification is guaranteed. If, for example, English classes are grouped by ability, then council members chosen from English classes would be certain to include representation from all levels of the student body.

A final method which has been found to be effective is to appoint some members-at-large, who will be selected from

groups of students normally not represented on the student council. In some council constitutions, provisions are made for the principal to have the right to appoint from two to six members-at-large from the student body. In other councils, the faculty nominates a slate of members-at-large, from which the student body then makes its selections. In both cases the objective is the same: to include on the council those students who are badly needed but who would otherwise not be elected. The quiet boy with creative ideas, the gadfly who isn't socially accepted, the Negro who seems a bit radical, the boy from the vocational course who has much influence with his classmates: these and others similar to them are the ones we are trying to reach.

By making council membership attractive and by broadening the base of membership, the principal can take two important steps in securing an active membership.

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Council Officers and the Election Process

WE WOULD always hope, of course, that we could attract such outstanding members to the student council that concerns about good leadership would be almost superfluous. However, our sense of reality suggests that good leaders are essential to the success of any organization, and that strong leadership is especially critical in an organization composed of young people.

Since the process by which members and officers are elected is important in determining the type of leaders we get, it might be useful to begin with an examination of the school election system for members and officers. The approach here again is not to state some perfect system for elections, but rather to suggest some ideas that local principals and councils might examine.

The objectives, of course, are to find procedures that will be essentially democratic and that will succeed in electing the most able students to leadership positions. What possible procedures might accomplish these objectives?

THE BASIS FOR ELECTIONS

As suggested in the previous chapter, principals should re-examine the notion that the homeroom election is the only possible way of organizing for council elections. Curriculum-group or subject-group elections have been suggested as ways of achieving heterogeneity. Groups larger than homerooms might readily become the basis for elections; it might well be that the most effective way of enhancing council prestige would

be to make it more limited in its membership. Schools that have a school-within-a-school organization might well consider having members chosen to represent groups of 150 students. Another possibility is the bicameral legislature, with a large general assembly elected from homerooms or classrooms and a smaller senate elected from more broadly based groups.

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

If we wish students to get excited about the student council, then we must be sure that they have time to campaign actively for election. Certainly three weeks is not too much time to give students a chance to make posters and banners, write campaign songs, and deliver campaign speeches. Typically, the student in the homeroom gives one five-minute speech to his classmates; it would be much more interesting—and a better test of his staying power—if each student running for council office were required to give a brief speech on some current issue every week of the campaign.

We would also make one more suggestion likely to shock most school people: we think students should be allowed to organize their own political parties. While we are all aware of the dangers of factionalism, the party system has much to recommend it. Most important, it parallels the election system most commonly found in our own democracy—and in the colleges most of the students will attend. Also, it will probably do more than anything else to develop interest in the council and its elections. Students, of course, will still be able to split their tickets (a term they will get to know through actual practice); the parties would simply function during campaign time to line up candidates and to develop platforms.

It is in the platform development stage that most council election systems are abominably weak. Students run for office or for membership simply out of a desire to achieve status, and their classmates vote for them because they know them and like them. Whether or not we use a party system, students should

be encouraged to develop their platforms, to publicize those platforms, and to base their campaigns on issues. And we would do well to teach the student body, in general, the importance of voting for issues and platforms, not simply for personalities.

A hotly-contested election campaign should be climaxed by a major election day, with ceremony surrounding it, as is the case with national elections. The principal might cast the first symbolic ballot—or this function might be performed by the outgoing council president. Many municipalities have cooperated with the schools by lending voting machines. Sometimes local newspapers can be interested in taking a photograph of the first student voter. And the final announcement of the winners should be made with as much ceremony as we can muster. The whole intent, here, of course, is to say to all the students: "The council is important; council election is an honor; ~~and student participation in school administration is one of the~~ most important parts of school life."

The timing of elections is also important. Principals might weigh seriously the advantages of a late-winter election period. By this time, students have had a good chance to get to know each other, real leadership has begun to emerge in the student body, and the elections will pick up school spirits during the late-winter slump. The late-winter election will also give the lame-duck council a chance to train the new members, thus increasing the chances of a smooth transition.

One final point about the election of officers: in many schools the officers are elected from the student body at large. While this method is designed to stimulate greater interest on the part of the student body, it will also most certainly result in the election of the most popular—not necessarily the most able—student. The author believes that principals should consider the possibility of having the new student council elect its own officers. Certainly council members should be more astute in identifying leadership than the general student body, and the president so chosen will more likely possess those qualities of administrative leadership so necessary in a council officer.

If we have had an exciting campaign and have been fortunate in getting good officers elected, can we stop there, assured that the officers can manage on their own? Obviously to do so is to run a great risk. And the principal should assume a major responsibility—along with the adviser—for the continued growth and development of the council officers.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

First, he should see to it that council officers attend national and state conventions and summer leadership workshops for the invaluable training they will receive there. Second, he should ensure that the council has developed its own library of leadership training materials.

It is also essential to the growth of officers that they get frequent feedback from the members. It might be very profitable if council officers were required to survey members monthly on questions like the following:

- To what extent do council officers organize the work of the council?
- To what extent are council officers sensitive to the problems of the school?
- To what extent do council officers make effective use of talents of council members?
- To what extent are council members effective in holding and conducting council meetings?
- To what extent do council members effectively delegate responsibilities and follow up to see that assignments are being discharged?
- To what extent are council officers achieving the goals which they set for themselves?

More important than any such survey, however, is the personal relationships between the principal and the council officers. There are dangers, of course, in the principal concerning himself too directly with the council officers. Such an intense interest might be misinterpreted by the adviser as a lack of faith in the adviser's ability, or as a desire to interfere. There is a greater danger: positive interest can quickly degenerate

into an attempt to dictate. Many weak councils are floundering because of a strong principal who has become a benevolent despot, holding the hands of the officers, telling them what to do, and suggesting what they might next undertake. If a principal fears that he is leaning in this direction, he would be much better off if he simply had nothing at all to do with the council.

However, there is a middle ground between "twisting arms" and "hands-off," and that middle ground is represented by a principal who works closely with the officers without usurping the adviser's functions, who shares ideas with them without attempting to dictate, who takes a positive interest in the council without becoming paternalistic. To such a principal, the following suggestions might seem helpful.

To begin with, it would be wise, right after the election or as soon as the school year begins, to meet with the officers and the adviser for an opening session at which the following questions might be discussed:

- What are the major school problems that administration and officers have identified?
- What are the major concerns of the student body as a whole?
- What are the goals of the faculty and the administration for the year to come, and how might the council help in achieving those goals?
- What are the goals of council officers for the year to come, and how might the administration help in achieving those goals?

This opening meeting is so important that the principal might even make it a dinner meeting, at which the council officers and the adviser are his guests.

The major intent of such a meeting is to say (in effect) to the council leaders: "The success of our school is a shared responsibility. The principal, as leader of the faculty, and the council officers, as leaders of the student body, must work closely together to achieve that success."

But the dialog must not, of course, stop with this first dinner meeting. It would seem to be essential for the principal to meet periodically with the officers and the adviser to review progress

made, to continue identifying problems, to help the officers detect their own weaknesses, and to keep the council moving in a forward direction.

Only through such systematic and continual dialog between principal and officers can genuine democratic leadership be fostered—and only as it is fostered will the council succeed.

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The Faculty and the Adviser

BOTH THE title of this publication and the present emphasis up to this point might suggest that the principal and the student council stand in isolation from the rest of the school, and that the success of the council rests solely upon the support of the principal and the activity of the members.

Such, of course, is not the case at all. To a great extent the role that the council plays in a school is contingent upon the degree to which the faculty in general supports the objectives of the council and the extent to which the adviser in particular is successful in providing adult leadership. It is to these two concerns that the present chapter addresses itself.

WINNING FACULTY SUPPORT

If the faculty of a school in general believes that the student council as an organization is ineffectual and that student participation in school administration as a principle is unimportant, then even the strongest council will have difficulty in succeeding. For the faculty will unwittingly permit their attitudes to condition their statements and decisions about council activity.

We still remember vividly a council president coming to us, livid in rage. "I just came from Mr. _____'s room. I asked him if I could be excused to go to the council meeting, and he said, 'Why should I excuse you from my class to go play your silly games of student government?'"

With such an attitude as this being manifested by the teachers, it is difficult to see how any council could succeed.

It is therefore quite essential for the principal to do all he can to support the council against faculty negativism. What are the roots of this negativism? Perhaps if we can identify them we can then search for some solutions.

SOME NEGATIVE FACULTY ATTITUDES

One common faculty attitude is that the council is simply an unimportant appendage to the school's program. Teachers who think this way are typically critical of the entire school activity program as being a diversion from what they consider the sole concern of the schools—the mastery of academic content. While it is difficult to change such an attitude overnight, ingrained as it is from decades of obsession with content, the principal can begin to make a dent by persistent in-service work.

A second attitude frequently manifested is that the student council is a necessary but innocuous game that students must play at school. Teachers who hold this view rarely object strongly to council activities; they simply refuse to take them seriously. As a result, they are patronizing towards the council and its projects and perhaps do as much damage in this way as do those who actively oppose the council.

Finally, there are a few faculty members who are jealous of the prerogatives of the council. At times this jealousy is simply a projection of the resentment they feel towards the adviser, whom they may see as some favored individual not carrying his full instructional load.

In each attitude, of course, there is a modicum of justification. The central business of the school is education, and the curriculum is the primary means of discharging this responsibility. Some councils, as was pointed out, do fritter away much time in trivial pursuits. And there is always a danger in granting too much privilege to members, officers, and advisers; undue favoritism to any member or to an adviser can put the council in a negative light with the faculty.

HOW THE PRINCIPAL CAN MEET THE CHALLENGE

However, while there is some slight justification for each of these negative attitudes, the principal has a responsibility to create a climate where such attitudes can be confronted head-on, where their truth can be identified, and where measures can be proposed to elicit faculty support based on full understanding, not developed under duress. What specific measures can the principal take to create such a climate?

- Hold a faculty meeting to discuss the student council, its objectives, and its problems.
- Invite council officers to a faculty meeting to share with the faculty some of their concerns.
- Let the council president take the first five minutes of a monthly faculty meeting to brief the faculty on council activities and to answer questions from the teachers about council matters.
- Meet with the faculty in small groups during their preparation periods to discuss the council and its objectives.
- Arrange for small groups of faculty and student council members to meet together to discuss common concerns.
- Some school administrators have successfully used sensitivity training procedures with their faculties—and a few of the most venturesome have included student leaders—with excellent results.

None of these methods, in and of itself, is guaranteed to produce results, but together they can begin a faculty-council dialog that could ultimately lead to meaningful support by the faculty of council activities. And again, in all of this, the principal must play a key role, not simply through his words, important enough as they are, but also through his actions in total support of the student council as an organization.

Perhaps it needs to be stressed here how crucial the adviser is in determining the faculty's attitude. If the adviser is someone who has the respect of the faculty, then much of the respect will be transferred to the council that he advises; conversely, if the adviser is held in low regard by the faculty, then, as indicated before, they will transfer some of this rejection to the student group with which he is identified. Since the adviser is also an im-

portant figure in the eyes of the members, it is quite essential that the principal give very careful consideration to his selection.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD ADVISER

What kind of adviser are we looking for? These criteria might be kept in mind as the principal considers his choice:

- He should understand the young adolescent, have a sincere respect for young people, and should be one with whom they can readily identify. This, of course, does not mean that he has to be young in years; we all know teachers close to retirement who still project the vigor of the young and who still empathize with the young.
- He should understand and believe totally in the democratic process. He should have enough courage to let young people make mistakes on their own; yet, he should have the wisdom to know when to interfere, balancing the council's need for adult guidance with its desire to be independent.

cedure, and at the same time have a thorough understanding of school law and school board policies, especially as they affect extracurricular activities.

- He should be conversant with and fully support the principles and practices of the National Association of Student Councils.
- He should have the respect and support of the entire faculty.

With these criteria in mind, how do we go about finding this adviser? We probably get the best results by an open announcement to the entire faculty, encouraging all interested to submit an application. Each candidate for the position then should be interviewed by the principal before a final selection is made.

A point might be made here about the length of term which an adviser should serve. While we all know outstanding advisers who have held the position for twenty or more years and continue to do a good job, it is more often likely that an adviser who has been in the position for more than five or six years begins to get in a rut. It might be wise, therefore, to suggest either a four-year term of office, or to have an annual evalua-

tion of the kind of job the adviser has done, relieving him of the assignment if the evaluation is not satisfactory.

Regardless of the term of office, this evaluation process is critical to the growth of the adviser and the organization. This writer, therefore, would suggest that in June of each school year, the principal and the adviser should begin the evaluation process—and that this evaluation should be totally separate from the teacher evaluation that is customarily made. It might be useful for all such evaluations to begin with a self-evaluation, in which the adviser completes a form something like the following:

STUDENT COUNCIL ADVISER SELF-EVALUATION FORM

Name of adviser _____ Date: _____

1. How many meetings has the council had this school year? _____
 2. How many meetings have you attended? _____
 3. How many committee meetings have you attended? _____
 4. How many conferences have you had with council leaders? _____
 5. How many state, regional, and national meetings have you attended? _____
 6. How many times have you met with the school administration to discuss council problems? _____
 7. What books and magazine articles have you read related to council and student activity? _____
 8. What do you think has been your most significant accomplishment to date as a student council adviser? _____
 9. Where do you sense your own need for greatest improvement as a student council adviser? _____
-

With such a completed form in hand, the adviser can then review with the principal his performance, his strengths, and his weaknesses as he perceives them.

A final word is perhaps in order about the necessity of giving the adviser time to do this all-important job. If the council is to play a significant role in the school, if it is to be a busy,

dynamic organization that infuses life into every aspect of the extra-curricular program, then it is imperative that the student council adviser be given time during the school day to work closely with council officers on council matters. Giving any teacher released time during the school day can be an expensive matter, of course; if a teacher's salary is \$8000 and we relieve him from one period of his teaching, then we are in effect spending \$1600 to give him the time he needs. Yet an energetic, successful adviser needs this released time if he is to function successfully.

An alternative, of course, is to release the adviser from study supervision, homeroom, and other duties. While such relief will be of assistance, it will not fully take the place of the added relief from class instruction that is so essential.

Some districts are also paying the faculty adviser an extra sum of money for successfully carrying out his duties; the sums paid seem to range between \$100 and \$1000, depending upon the size and the affluence of the district. While the extra money is always welcome as partial payment for the countless hours a good adviser puts in, it is never a substitute for giving him the time he needs.

A good adviser with good members will just about demand a good program—and that is the subject of our next chapter.

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The Council's Program

AN ORGANIZATION will live and flourish only so long as it performs a needed function. Consequently, any attempts to keep a moribund council alive by injections of enthusiasm are bound to fail unless we take the more radical measure of rejuvenating what is at the heart of the council—its program and its activities.

It was mentioned earlier that many councils failed because they spent most of their energy on fund raising, or spent endless hours dealing with trivia. Such a failure of program probably stems from two basic causes: the members lack a clear sense of purpose; or they lack the ability to achieve whatever goals they might have. Let us look at some possible solutions for each of these problems.

What are the objectives of the student council? What kinds of action can be undertaken—and what kind cannot be? If asked these questions, most council presidents would be hard pressed to answer, perhaps escaping embarrassment only by mumbling some fine phrases from the constitution. Such confusion of purpose exists because the principal and the adviser have never met with the council to discuss these basic issues. And rarely can we find in writing any specific listing of areas in which the council has a place. Lacking such discussions and such a charter of rights and responsibilities, the councils typically assume that their role is a minimal one, chiefly confined to the extra-curricular.

The author would argue that the council can reach the rebel and the uncommitted only if it plays an active part in every aspect of the school and only if it concerns itself chiefly with

the central purpose of the school—teaching and learning. If the school's central purpose is learning, and if learning is most effective when the learner is actively involved, and if the council is the organization most representative of all learners, then logically the council must be vitally and significantly concerned with curriculum and instruction.

Now it is obvious that schools will not surrender to the students control over teaching and learning, and that faculties, rightly or wrongly, will guard very jealously their own rights to determine the educational destinies of the young. What is needed, then, is for the principal, the student council adviser, student council officers, and representatives of the faculty to sit down together and to draft a charter of council rights.

Although each council should develop its own charter, perhaps the following might serve as a starting point:

A CHARTER FOR THE STUDENT COUNCIL

Introduction: The schools in a democracy must educate for democratic living. The schools can most effectively accomplish this goal by creating a democratic environment where students and teachers are both actively involved in meaningful decision-making. Such active involvement by the students can best be achieved by a representative student government given certain basic rights and responsibilities.

Yet the school operates under state law, is part of a school system governed by a board of school directors and administered by a superintendent, and is itself directed by its own faculty. Each of these agencies—the law, the school board, the superintendent, the school faculty—for its own purposes, restricts the rights of the students for the necessary operation of the school. In many aspects of school life, therefore, the student council can play only a consultative and advisory role.

This charter, therefore, proposes clearly to establish those areas where the council can only advise and those areas where the council can decide.

A. In these areas the council's role is *advisory*:

1. The council cannot modify the length of the school day, but it can suggest changes in ways in which the school day is scheduled.

2. The council cannot modify the required number of days of school attendance, but it can inform the superintendent of the school of the preferences of the students about the length and timing of vacation periods.
 3. The council cannot evaluate teachers, but it can propose methods and criteria for evaluation.
 4. The council cannot establish the school curriculum, but it can suggest that courses be added.
 5. The council cannot mandate changes in instruction, but it can suggest changes in instructional methodology, instructional group size, and plans for independent study.
 6. The council cannot discipline students, but it can propose changes in school disciplinary policies and practices.
 7. The council cannot determine course content, but it can make recommendations for such content.
 8. The council cannot allocate space within the building, but it can make suggestions for the better deployment of school facilities.
 9. The council cannot change the school's grading system, but it can make proposals for such changes.
 10. The council cannot spend tax monies, but it can make recommendations for such expenditures.
- B. In the following areas, the council's role is a *determining* one, with ratification by the principal:
1. The council can establish its own curriculum. The council will be encouraged to organize courses to be given after school, during the school's independent study time, and during school vacation periods.
 2. The council can devise its own means of instruction. The council will be encouraged to establish a corps of student tutors to assist students within and outside its own school and to set up its own learning center.
 3. The council can write its own materials for instruction. The council will be encouraged to provide the leadership for students to write instructional materials for other students.
 4. The council can develop its own program with the community. The council will be encouraged to identify community resources, to meet with parent groups, to assist service agencies in the community, and to undertake and support community projects.

5. The council can develop its own program with other schools. The council will be encouraged to develop close working relationships and to foster exchange programs with schools in nearby communities, with schools in other parts of the nation, and with schools overseas.
 6. The council can charter other school organizations.
 7. The council can develop its own calendar of social activities for the students.
 8. The council can raise its own funds and can establish policies and procedures for fund-raising by other student groups.
 9. The council can establish its own awards and can establish policies governing awards by other groups.
 10. The council can hold its own elections and can develop policies for all other school elections.
-

What is being suggested is a dramatic shift in council orientation away from fund-raising and dance-sponsoring and towards the central concerns of the school—teaching, learning, curriculum. There is also suggested another kind of shift: a shift from concern for the self towards concern for the other, a shift from council serving council towards council serving others—other students, other schools, others in the community. Such a council, it is argued, will give the rebel a cause and will make the uncommitted see the excitement of meaningful service.

The new council of the 70's, then, will not be spending its time wrestling with the question of whether or not the dress code should sanction sideburns, or whether the carnival will be held in October or November, but will be deeply involved in matters of the greatest urgency. What will they be doing? The following list might suggest some of the types of activities that will give a note of reality and urgency to what council does:

- Conducting remedial classes in a disadvantaged neighborhood.
- Refurbishing a community center for youth and adults.
- Setting up a city-suburb exchange program.
- Meeting with the principal to recommend new courses for the school's curriculum.
- Arranging for an after-school series of school lectures on "Black Militancy and White Power."

- Developing a form for evaluating class instruction.
- Organizing a student-led seminar on "Contemporary Issues," to be offered in summer school, without grades or credits.
- Setting up a corps of student tutors to help slow-learners in the school.
- Developing student-written individualized learning materials.
- Meeting with community leaders to make plans for more effective use of community resources.
- Meeting with parents to explore school problems as parents perceive them.
- Making a proposal to the school board for the hiring of teacher aides.
- Meeting with school department chairmen to recommend changes in instructional methods and group size.

Clearly, such a program could be controversial. But we need to risk controversy in a search for relevancy. We have been respectable too long; it is now time to be relevant. Clearly, this sort of program places great demands upon council leaders and the principal to make sure that major projects are completed successfully. And it is here—in this second problem of not being able to accomplish goals—that the principal can be most helpful.

First, as previously indicated, it would seem highly desirable for the principal to meet with the adviser and the council officers right after the election, or at the start of the school year, to lay out a program for action. Student leaders need help in establishing priorities, in developing an "action calendar," in identifying and allocating resources, in developing a plan of action, in assigning responsibilities.

Second, the student officers need a great deal of assistance and direction in basic leadership skills. Directing an active student council in a large high school can be a demanding administrative task; yet we foolishly ask an inexperienced high school student to take it on without training. Literature on leadership and meetings at the state and national level can be a great help here, but it is imperative that the principal and the adviser give on-the-spot help when it is needed—or, pre-

ferably, much before it is needed. Council officers should be assisted in developing such skills as:

- how to delegate authority
- how to follow up and check on delegated tasks
- how to use committees to get preliminary work done
- how to conduct meetings efficiently
- how to resolve serious differences between members
- how to get all council members participating actively
- how to strengthen weak members

Council presidents especially need help in learning how to streamline council meetings. Most council meetings have agendas that are too long and include too many matters that are strictly routine. There is a need to get important council business done—and yet to permit time for open discussion of controversial issues.

Some schools have experimented with a specialized council meeting calendar, which might look something like this:

- 1st Monday of each month: routine council business and committee reports; held before school day begins.
- 2nd Monday of each month: open session of council, for free discussion by any students who wish to appear; no business transacted; held during the school day.
- 3rd Monday of each month: major committee report submitted, with full discussion and action by council held during the school day.
- 4th Monday of each month: no council meeting; time available for committees to meet during their own free time.

By using such a calendar as this, the council will ensure that major matters do not get buried beneath a load of trivia, that there is full time for student discussion without interfering with council business, and that action is taken on important questions.

We would suggest, then, that a council that has a program of action focused on school and community concerns and that knows how to get its jobs accomplished will be a council that will flourish and that will command the support of the entire student body.

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A Glance at the Future

WE LIVE in times of almost traumatic change. Slowly, yet perceptibly, the schools are responding to change—with new schedules, new media, new organizational patterns, new relationships with the community. And the pace of change in the 70's will be dramatically accelerated, if we can safely extrapolate from present trends. Such changes in the school must be clearly reflected in concomitant changes in student councils. The student council of 1940 cannot serve the schools of the 1970's.

Thus far we have tried to demonstrate that most of the changes can take place within the traditional council framework. And it is our sincere conviction that the basic structure of student council is essentially democratic and geared for change—and that what is needed is new membership, new leadership, new ideas. Yet we would be remiss if we did not point out that there may be more pervasive changes needed. We want effective student involvement in the affairs of the school, and we want meaningful democracy to the extent that it is possible in our schools. Thus, the council is a means, not an end, and it may well be that the 70's will see entirely different means develop.

What forms might these new means take? It is always difficult to be sure about the future, but perhaps we can identify some possibilities:

- decentralized councils, each autonomous, representing a single grade, or a school-within-school
- bicameral councils, with a smaller senate group meeting in weekly sessions with the principal

- councils composed of the acknowledged leaders of student gangs and cliques
- councils elected for only one semester, with a clear mandate to get a specific job done or be removed from office by student voters
- greater use of student petition, referendum and recall
- open forums held during the school day for the entire student body
- parent-student councils meeting in the community
- teacher-student councils, with one-man, one-vote
- the "Free-School," like the Free University, living side by side with the regular schools, with its own council
- no council at all, because the school has provided so many real opportunities for democratic leadership that the council simply no longer is necessary.

None of these trends may materialize, and the changes envisioned may come only slowly, if at all. Yet if the schools are to survive the rebellion of the disenchanted—black and white—and if they are to speak meaningfully to the uncommitted, principals had better get busy and do something fast. It is later, much later, than we think.